THE SPECIAL COLLECTION IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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NEW ZEALAND LIBRARIES are growing fast. University libraries are keeping up with this general tendency, and it is on record that the Otago University has doubled its size since 1935. It is only natural that with the increase of modern publications there should be a proportionate growth in the number of long out-of-date books, rare publications and the like. But while New Zealand librarians in the past have had their hands full with the task of making the collections under their care available to the general reader, they have not been able to pay much attention to the problem of the valuable and rare books in their libraries. Far be it from me to say that they did not know this problem—on the contrary, several outstanding New Zealand librarians were only too painfully aware of the difficulties involved. But the task of making the recently published material in New Zealand libraries accessible was of primary importance.

Nor has the day arrived when we can relax and say that the organization of New Zealand book resources has reached the maximum of efficiency. Nevertheless, it may be true to say that we have reached a stage of development at which we should stop for a short while and consider the implications of possessing a certain number of rare and valuable works, which, if they are to be of any use to New Zealanders, not only require the most careful storage, but also need to be catalogued and cared for by specialists who know how to make them useful sources of research.

THE SKELETON IN THE CUPBOARD

Until now it has undoubtedly been the common practice to lock any book that seemed at all valuable into a case, or if need be into a small part of the stacks, leaving it a prey to dust, dirt, vermin and dry rot. It is only fair to acknowledge that in most cases they have at least been preserved from the ravages of water. But when preserved in this manner, such books have also been kept protected from the lustful eye of the curious as well as from the searching finger of the student. It is not difficult to find reasons and excuses for this state of affairs: lack of trained staff (or even of any kind of staff), lack of space, lack of interest on the part of readers—though the last is a moot point; interest might have been shown had there been a chance of satisfying it.

The problem of how to deal with the rare and the valuable books (these two are not always identical)* is of real importance only in the

* To save space, I shall refer to ' rare books ' only from now on, but this term should be taken to include all those books which are *valuable and or rare.*

'open access' library. In a closed access library, where damage done by the browsing customer is impossible, special storage conditions have to be provided only to house the rare books. In an open access library, however, the problem is quite a different one. That a rare book cannot be left on the open shelves becomes obvious with the help of a little arithmetic. But it is equally a matter of addition to see that the special treatment they need is costly in all respects: space, staff and general upkeep.

There are obviously two chief aspects to this whole problem. One is to decide which books are rare and precious. The other is to show how to deal with them economically. The first question is by far the more difficult to answer, the other resolves itself into a number of recommendations which are chiefly based on experiments summarized in many volumes of library literature.

DECIDING A BOOK'S RARITY

The question of rarity and value is ever-changing. To some extent it depends on place, in all respects it depends on the time. To us in New Zealand, books dealing with the early history of this country are of particular interest and value. Sir George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology*, first published in London in 1855, is worth a lot to us in its first edition, and it is also worth a lot in its 1885 edition, printed in Auckland. It is doubtful whether an American library would have the same interest in either edition unless it specialized in New Zealand literature. It is also doubtful whether it has any other value than that of being an early New Zealand book. On the other hand, an old edition of Plato's works may fetch a big sum on the second-hand book market, but I think that no New Zealand library has a genuine interest in its purchase, since there are so many better modern editions of Plato. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to expose, say, an Aldine edition of Plato, should it happen to be in the library, to the dangers of an open shelf.

Thus we have two criteria by which to judge the advisability or otherwise of keeping a book in the treasure room or on the open shelves: 1, its importance as an historic treasure; 2, the cost of replacement should it become damaged or lost. Quite clearly both these criteria apply often to the same book—in fact, on numerous occasions they cannot be separated.

There is on the whole little buying of old books on the part of New Zealand libraries. However, a good number of books published more than 100 years ago have found their way into our libraries through donations and bequests. This fact does not lessen their value to the library. It must be quite clearly understood by all librarians that the monetary value of a book is measured solely by the cost of replacement. For it would be foolish to say that the library of X is worth £10,000 because it cost that sum to buy books for it. To be added to that sum is the large number of donations which, maybe, represent the most precious collections.

FASHIONABLE BOOK VALUES

On the other hand, it must be realized that the market value of a book is little more stable than that of any other commodity which is subject to an outburst of fashion. A book printed by William Morris may be

worth £20 today, tomorrow, this year. Next year, interest in William Morris wanes, and the same book may be obtained for £5. What is its intrinsic value? Nothing, unless your library attempts to provide a sample collection of printing types and publishers.

To help to decide what constitutes a rare book, such as should be withdrawn from the open shelves, I shall cite a passage from Dr George Sarton's survey of Klebs's *Incunabula Scientifica.** 'The American libraries are so generous in opening their well-ordered shelves to responsible students that they are obliged to create "treasure rooms" where the most precious volumes may be kept under closer supervision. There is unfortunately much confusion of thought as to what "the most precious books" are. I am afraid that collectors' aberrations are but too often allowed to dominate . . . I would say that every book printed before 1801 should be kept under lock and key . . . Each library would thus be divided into two parts: the ancient part, the growth of which would be under normal conditions very slow . . . and the new part, growing on the contrary very rapidly. The ancient part would include all the books anterior to 1801, plus any other which it would not be expedient to leave in the open shelves . . . It should be noted that that closed or restricted part of the library would be considerably larger than the "treasure rooms" of today; indeed it would form a separate library (in the same building or not) with a separate staff, the members of which have a somewhat different training and aptitudes from the members of the open and growing library. My point is that while any acquisitive and predacious idiot can learn to recognize a book which is "precious" as collectors understand it . . . it is sometimes difficult, even for an expert, to determine which are the truly precious books of the past. It is possible that the humblest of them turn out to be very important for the historian, and especially for the historian of science.'†

Thus wrote the greatest of living historians of science himself, and he concluded his introduction to the analysis of scientific incunabula by declaring, 'To mistake a collector for a scholar is almost as silly as to mistake a sacristan for a saint, though some collectors have been genuine scholars and it is not altogether impossible for a sacristan to be disinterested and holy.'‡

I think it would be fair enough to consider ourselves as sacristans, and I hope some of us are at least disinterested. Holy—well, we'd better leave that to posterity!

To return to out problem: it is obvious, in the light of Dr Sarton's remarks, that it is the potential value of a book to later students which should be the chief criterion of its value and, in consequence, of its inclusion or otherwise in the 'special collection' (which I think a much better term than 'rare books room' or, worse still, 'treasure room.' However, it stands to reason that a modern publication of exceptional cost should also be kept off the open shelves and be protected by inclusion in the special collection.

* Sarton, G. The scientific literature transmitted through the incunabula. In *Osiris* 5: 41-245.

† *op. cit.*, p.91.

‡ *op. cit.*, p.93.

WHERE TO KEEP THE SPECIAL COLLECTION

The other aspect of the problem is that of how to deal with such a special collection. There are two basic solutions, each of which allows of a number of variations.

1. Books which are debarred from the open shelves may be kept in locked stacks.
2. Books which are selected for the special collection may be kept in a separate part of the library with specially trained library staff caring for them; they cannot be borrowed.

As for (1), it is the present practice, as far as I know, everywhere in New Zealand. There are variations, ranging from the time-honoured custom of keeping rare books in the librarian's office to the somewhat tidier practice of keeping rare books in a special room. As long as nobody is in charge of these rooms (and what is more, is trained to take charge of special collections), the rare books room is nothing but a locked continuation of the stacks.

It must be understood, of course, that when I speak of special collections I do not mean departmental libraries as we know them, for instance, at the University of Otago and at Canterbury University College, where there are special assistants in charge of the Dental School Library, the Engineering School Library, etc., but rather that kind of special collection alluded to by Dr Sarton and vulgarly misnamed ' rare books collection.'

PROTECTION AGAINST ACTS OF GOD AND BURGLARS

There are some basic requirements in regard to the physical condition of the rooms (or even of the locked stacks!) which house special collections:

1. They must be proof against burglars, fire, water, earthquake or other ' acts of God.'
2. They must have devices which can regulate temperature and humidity.
3. It is advisable to have glass cases (*without* locks) in order to prevent the infiltration of dust and soot.
4. It is advisable to have a separate catalogue of the special collection in the room or rooms where it is housed. Entries in this catalogue would need to be rather full, including complete analytics of association copies and the like. There should also be a separate microfilm reader in the room housing the special collection.

It may seem at first that all this is a good deal of trouble and involves much expense while there is no indication as yet that anybody will make much use of such a collection.

The second of these objections is a very feeble one, and the first is often very much overestimated. Any library worthy of its name should be proof against the ravages mentioned under (1) above, and should also have provision made to conform to (2). The simple reason is that all books worthy of being included in the library's holdings are worth being preserved. The provisions suggested under (4) are of use only if there are librarians or library assistants who know what to do with books in the special collection, and I cannot help thinking that there will be no progress in the field of historical research in New Zealand until we have librarians trained to prepare the holdings of historical material

in New Zealand libraries for that very purpose. It is foolish to say that while there is so little demand for material for serious historical research there is no need to do anything more than has been done in the past. The fact is that at present scarcely anybody can engage in serious historical research because our libraries are not prepared for it.

I willingly admit that the fault lies not with librarians alone. Our institutions of research are unduly preoccupied with the present and, perhaps, with the future. There is very little understanding of the fact that both the present and the future grow out of the past, and that without a knowledge of the past, there can be no satisfactory interpretation of our own time. Librarians, however, could help a great deal by making the historical material under their care properly available.

THE GREY MANUSCRIPT OF CICERO

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No. 11 IN THE GREY Ms catalogue of the Auckland Public Library is a manuscript of Cicero's 'De Divinatione' and 'De Natura Deorum.' It consists of 117 leaves of vellum, measuring 8½ in. by 5¾ in., and is written in a very beautiful Italian hand of the 15th century. There are normally 26 lines to the page. The Ms is gathered in quires of 10; on the lower margin of the verso side of the last leaf of each quire the scribe has jotted down, as a catchword, the final words of the finished page and the opening words of the next.

As it stands, the Ms is not complete. Ff. 1-30 contain the text of 'De Divinatione' Book I, chapters 1-120 ('. . . efficit peneq ; cogi . . . '). The last 12 chapters of Book I, and the whole of Book II are missing; but the catchword in the lower margin of f.30v is 'cogitat quanto,' proving that the scribe had continued beyond the point where the Ms now breaks off in the middle of the word 'cogitat.' Then follow the three books of the 'De Natura Deorum' (Book I ff. 31r-56v, II ff. 56v-95v, III ff. 95v-117v). Book III again is not quite complete, f. 117v ending with 'ita discessimus ut ve . . . ' There follows a torn scrap of an original f. 118, but the words which complete the final sentence of Book III ('. . . lleio is not quite complete, f. 117v ending with 'ita discessimus ut ve . . . ' There follows a torn scrap of an original f. 118, but the